

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT FR
SUBJECT: CONFLICT WITHIN MAJORITY OVER PARIS MAYORALTY
ELECTION COULD THREATEN VIABILITY OF GOVERN-
MENT COALITION

1. SUMMARY: A COMBINATION OF (A) GISCARD'S CONCLUSION THAT CHIRAC'S CANDIDACY FOR THE MAYOR OF PARIS IS A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO HIS AUTHORITY AS PRESIDENT AND (B) VERBAL BACK-BITING BETWEEN PROMINENT SUPPORTERS OF THE PRESIDENT SUCH AS PONIATOWSKI, LECANUET AND FRANCOISE GIROUD AND RPR FIGURES GUENA, CLAUDE LABBE AND JEROME MONOD HAS WORSENED RELATIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY. THE QUESTION REMAINS WHETHER GISCARD WILL ALLOW THIS SPECTACLE TO CONTINUE TO THE POINT WHERE HE WOULD TRY TO BLOCK CHIRAC FROM BECOMING MAYOR EVEN IF CHIRAC CLEARLY HAS THE MOST COUNCIL SEATS IN THE COMBINED TOTAL OF ALL MAJORITY LISTS. THIS WOULD BE POSSIBLE BECAUSE CHIRAC WILL NOT HAVE A MAJORITY OF THE SEATS ON THE COUNCIL, AND WILL NEED THE ADDITION OF SOME OF D'ORNANO'S SEATS TO BE ELECTED MAYOR. THE EMOTIONAL FEELING AGAINST CHIRAC IS SO IRRATIONALLY HIGH AT THE ELYSEE THAT WE CANNOT TOTALLY EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT GISCARD MIGHT ORDER D'ORNANO TO REFUSE TO GIVE CHIRAC HIS VOTES IN THE COUNCIL, THEREBY ASSURING THE ELECTION OF A MAYOR FROM THE UNION OF THE LEFT. IF

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THIS HAPPENS, CHIRAC WOULD HAVE LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO CAUSE MAJOR DISRUPTIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM IN PARLIAMENT NEXT APRIL, THEREBY ENDANGERING THE BARRE PLAN AND POSSIBLY CAUSING PREMATURE AND UNWANTED LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. BARRE, WHO HAS NO EMOTIONAL STAKE IN THE PARIS RACE, IS TRYING TO COOL EMOTIONS ON ALL SIDES AND MAY FIND A WAY TO PERSUADE GISCARD TO LET CHIRAC BE

MAYOR IF HE WINS THE BULK OF THE MAJORITY'S SEATS IN THE COUNCIL. END SUMMARY.

2. TENSION BETWEEN THE GAULLISTS AND THE GISCARD-CONTROLLED ELEMENTS OF THE MAJORITY COALITION HAS BECOME SO STRONG AS A RESULT OF THE CONFLICT OVER THE PARIS MAYORALTY ELECTION THAT THE EFFORT TO DEFEAT THE COMMON PROGRAM IN 1978 THREATENS TO SELF-DESTRUCT BEFORE IT GETS OFF THE GROUND. THIS PROSPECT IS IRONIC BECAUSE IN THE REST OF FRANCE THE MAJORITY COALITION HAS DONE A BETTER JOB OF PRESENTING UNITED LISTS IN MAJOR CITIES THAN THE SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS.

3. IN PARIS THE PROBLEM STEMS FROM GISCARD'S PERCEPTION OF CHIRAC'S CANDIDACY AS A DIRECT CHALLENGE TO HIS PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITY. THERE IS A STRONG ELEMENT OF EMOTION AND EGO IN THE PRESIDENT'S PERCEPTION WHICH BLINDS HIM TO THE REALITY THAT THE UNITED LEFT CAN BE DEFEATED IN 1978 ONLY IF CHIRAC SUCCEEDS IN HIS PLAN TO REJUVENATE AND REORGANIZE THE GAULLIST POLITICAL MACHINE. TIRED AND RUSTY AS THE GAULLISTS HAVE BECOME, THEY CONSTITUTE THE ONLY ORGANIZED NETWORK OF GRASSROOTS OPERATIVES THE MAJORITY CAN COUNT ON. IN ADDITION, THEY CONTINUE TO HAVE THE LARGEST NUMBER OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT UNTIL THE NEXT ELECTION. IT IS THEREFORE VIRTUALLY ASSURED THAT IF CHIRAC ENDS UP WITH MANY MORE CITY COUNCIL SEATS THAN D'ORNANO, AND GISCARD PERSISTS WITH APPARENT PRES-ENT PLANS TO STOP CHIRAC AT ALL COSTS, WE CAN EXPECT A MAJOR CRISIS WHEN PARLIAMENT RECONVENES APRIL 2.

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4. WITH TWO WEEKS TO GO IN THE CAMPAIGN, THE POLLS SHOW THAT THE UNITED LEFT WILL MAKE MAJOR GAINS IN PARIS BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO WIN A MAJORITY OF SEATS ON THE CITY COUNCIL. THE CHIRAC AND D'ORNANO LISTS SHOULD BE ABLE

TO WIN A COMBINED TOTAL OF ABOUT 65 SEATS TO THE LEFT'S 44. THE DIVISION OF SEATS BETWEEN CHIRAC AND D'ORNANO, HOWEVER, IS LIKELY TO GIVE EACH FEWER SEATS THAN THE UNITED LEFT. OUR CURRENT ESTIMATE IS THAT THE LEFT WILL HAVE 44 SEATS, CHIRAC 40 AND D'ORNANO 25. IF THIS ESTIMATE IS BORNE OUT BY THE RESULTS, IT WILL BE NECESSARY FOR CHIRAC AND D'ORNANO TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE THAT THE MAYOR OF PARIS IS NOT FROM ONE OF THE THREE PARTIES OF THE UNITED LEFT.

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5. ONLY THREE BALLOTS ARE PERMITTED IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL TO ELECT A MAYOR. ON THE FIRST TWO BALLOTS, AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IS REQUIRED FOR ELECTION. ON THE THIRD AND LAST BALLOT, THE CANDIDATE WITH THE MOST VOTES IS ELECTED. IN THE HYPOTHETICAL SEAT DISTRIBUTION ESTIMATED ABOVE, THE D'ORNANO COUNCILLORS COULD ASSURE CHIRAC'S DEFEAT AND A LEFT VICTORY MERELY BY CONTINUING TO VOTE FOR D'ORNANO ON THE THIRD BALLOT. THE EMBASSY HAS REACHED THE CONCLUSION THAT THE EMOTIONAL FEELING AGAINST CHIRAC IN THE ELYSEE IS SO STRONG THAT THIS HYPOTHESIS CAN NO LONGER BE COMPLETELY EXCLUDED.

6. IF THE SEAT COUNT IN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL GIVES CHIRAC A MAJOR VICTORY OVER D'ORNANO, CHIRAC WILL BE JUSTIFIED IN ASKING D'ORNANO TO GIVE HIM THE NECESSARY VOTES TO ELECT HIM MAYOR. IF Giscard ORDERS D'ORNANO TO REFUSE, AND TO PROPOSE INSTEAD THAT CHIRAC STEP DOWN IN FAVOR OF A THIRD CANDIDATE SUCH AS PIERRE-CHRISTIAN TAITTINGER, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT CHIRAC WILL CALL Giscard's BLUFF. IF THIS HAPPENS, AND A LEFT COUNCILLOR IS ELECTED MAYOR, CHIRAC WOULD HAVE LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO WITHDRAW GAULLIST SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNMENT WHEN PARLIAMENT RECONVENES, AND ALL BETS ABOUT THE TIMING OF THE

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LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS WOULD THEN BE OFF.

7. THE PROSPECT OF A DISRUPTIVE PARLIAMENTARY SESSION
LEADING TO UNWANTED EARLY ELECTIONS SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO
FORCE RAYMOND BARRE TO ACT NOW BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.
THIS REALITY IS CERTAINLY WHAT PROMPTED MINISTER OF
STATE GUICHARD TO WRITE TO BARRE MARCH FIRST ON BEHALF
OF ALL THE GAULLIST MINISTERS REQUESTING THAT BARRE TELL
THE OTHER MINISTERS (LECANUET AND PONIATOWSKI) TO STOP
ATTACKING CHIRAC AND ASSUME A NEUTRAL POSTURE. THE
GUICHARD LETTER WAS IN EFFECT THE FIRST WARNING OF
TROUBLE TO COME IN THE EVENT CHIRAC IS NOT ALLOWED TO
BECOME MAYOR IF HE BEATS D'ORNANO FAIR AND SQUARE. BARRE
HAS TRIED TO REMAIN NEUTRAL AND CLEARLY WANTS TO HAVE A
COOPERATIVE PARLIAMENT IN 1977 SO THAT HIS ECONOMIC
STABILIZATION PLAN CAN WORK IN PREPARATION FOR THE 1978
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. BARRE'S REPLY, RELEASED MARCH 3,
IS AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE PEACE BETWEEN THE TWO FACTIONS BY
PERMITTING MINISTERS TO SUPPORT CANDIDATES OF THEIR OWN
CHOICE BUT WARNING THEM NOT TO GO TOO FAR. IF BARRE IS
NOT HEeded AND IF HE IS NOT SUCCESSFUL IN CONVINCING
Giscard OF THE DANGER OF NOT CURTAILING THIS HOSTILITY
TOWARD CHIRAC, THE MAJORITY MAY WELL BE HANDING THE
NEXT PARLIAMENT TO THE LEFT ON A SILVER PLATTER.

8. THE TRAGEDY OF THIS SITUATION IS THAT IT NEED NOT
HAVE EXISTED. CHIRAC AND THE GAULLISTS WERE PREPARED TO
ACCEPT A CONSENSUS FOR NONCONTROVERSIAL CANDIDATES SUCH
AS FOREIGN AFFAIRS STATE SECRETARY TAITTINGER OR MINIS-
TER OF HEALTH SIMONE VEIL. BUT Giscard INSISTED ON
IMPOSING HIS OWN MAN, WHO THREATENED TO OUST THE GAUL-
LISTS FROM THEIR STRONGHOLD IN THE CAPITAL CITY. HIS
BIG MISTAKE WAS NOT ONLY ATTEMPTING TO IMPOSE A CANDIDATE
WHO COULD NOT WIN A CONSENSUS, BUT TRYING TO CONTROL A
PROCEDURE WITHOUT HAVING THE NECESSARY POWER TO DO SO.
THE ELECTION OF A MAYOR TAKES PLACE BY SECRET BALLOT
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WITHIN THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT
Giscard IS SHORTSIGHTED IF HE BELIEVES HE CAN MAINTAIN
HIS PRESENT MAJORITY IN POWER AND DESTROY CHIRAC AT THE
SAME TIME. THE TWO OBJECTIVES ARE COMPLETELY INCOMPAT-
IBLE. IN SHORT, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES Giscard BEARS THE
MAIN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS POTENTIAL DISASTER, AND WE
SEE BARRE AS THE BEST HOPE TO TALK SOME SENSE INTO HIM
BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE. IN ADDITION, THE PROSPECT OF A
LEFT-WING PS MAYOR (THE CERES FACTION DOMINATES THE PS
FEDERATION IN PARIS) MAY BRING CHIRAC'S ATTACKERS WITHIN
THE MAJORITY BACK TO REALITY.

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